



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

THE PRESIDENT AND THE SEGREGATION AT WASHINGTON

BY OSWALD GARRISON VILLARD

ON October 16, 1912, Woodrow Wilson, then the Democratic nominee for President, declared that: "Should I become President of the United States, they [the colored people] may count upon me for absolute fair dealing and for everything by which I could assist in advancing the interests of their race in the United States." This utterance gave complete satisfaction to those leaders of the colored people and the friends of the race who were urging them to break away from their thralldom to the Republican party and to vote for the Governor of New Jersey on the ground that the country would profit most by the election of the Democratic ticket. For decades previous the colored people, through their blind fealty to the Republican party, had been its pawns, to be used or shoved aside as the case might be. The rôle the colored delegates from the Southern States played in the Republican National Conventions is familiar to everybody; they were exploited and voted in blocks by the bosses who permitted them to over-represent their Southern States. The venality of these colored delegates, real or alleged, is one of the familiar reproaches to the race, though the convention of 1912 showed that they resisted tremendous temptation to abandon Taft and go over to Roosevelt, who more than once had genuinely championed their interests.

Nevertheless, any effort to make the negroes realize that they hold the balance of power in several middle-Western States, and that in independence of either party lies their best political hope, had been largely unsuccessful until the candidacy of Woodrow Wilson. The task of rounding up the colored voters for him was assigned to Judge Robert S. Hudspeth, National Committeeman from New Jersey, the

most conspicuous of the negro workers being Bishop Alexander Walters of New York. It was far from an easy one. Many of the colored men who flocked to Mr. Hudspeth's office were of the same stripe as those of the white race who crowded the other offices of the National Committee—seekers after jobs and seekers after immediate cash. To appeal to the thoughtful colored men was difficult enough; they were loath to break their historic ties with the Republican party, and if they did there was Roosevelt, still attractive, despite his decision that the Progressives should be a lily-white party. Moreover, the educated colored men knew that no colored student had been tolerated at Princeton while Woodrow Wilson was president, while the fact that he was of Southern birth and, if elected, was certain to be surrounded by Southern men, and that he had never expressed himself favorably to the colored people, made the thought of voting for him the more difficult. Nevertheless, the arguments of such colored men as Bishop Walters, and Dr. W. E. B. DuBois, the able editor of *The Crisis*, a magazine with the largest circulation ever obtained by a publication edited by a colored man, told, as did the promise of Woodrow Wilson cited above. Qualified observers believe that many more colored men voted the Democratic ticket in 1912 than ever before.

It was with dismay, therefore, that early in the Administration of Mr. Wilson, whose Cabinet is equally divided between Southerners and Northerners, there became noticeable in certain quarters a distinct hostility to the colored people. For a long time no appointments of negroes were made by the President. Then he nominated Adam E. Patterson of Oklahoma for the position of Register of the Treasury, a place long held by colored men. Patterson's nomination was the signal for outbursts from the most violent negrophobes in the Senate; Senators like Hoke Smith of Georgia, Vardaman of Mississippi, Tillman of South Carolina, and others, declaring that Patterson should not be confirmed, or any other colored man, for an office which would put him over white women clerks. With abject cowardice Patterson rushed to the White House and demanded that his name be withdrawn. Unwilling at this time to meet the issue thus raised, Mr. Wilson consented to his request, unlike Presidents Cleveland and Roosevelt, who, under similar circumstances, put the responsibility on the

Senate by continuing to nominate the colored candidates for office and by giving them recess appointments when the Senate was not in session. Instead, Mr. Wilson appointed a Cherokee Indian as Register. Since then Dr. George A. Buckner of Indiana has, however, been appointed Minister to Liberia, this nomination being confirmed, September 10th.

When a group of citizens holds so few Federal offices as do the negroes, each one takes on a significance far beyond any question of the salary or powers that may be attached to it. This is particularly true of the posts of Minister to Hayti and San Domingo. Not one of the stock Southern objections to negro appointments holds here; these ministers are accredited to colored people where the bogie of social equality cannot be raised. Under Mr. Wilson both of these posts have gone, temporarily, it is said, and doubtless for reasons satisfactory to Mr. Bryan, to white men. The colored people at large accepted this as notice from the White House that the remaining offices heretofore given to colored men were to be taken from them. Alarming as this was, on top of it came the startling news that for the first time in the history of the Federal Government race prejudice was having full swing in some of the Departments at Washington. What had not been dreamed of under Mr. Cleveland, though begun in one office under Mr. Taft, was being attempted under Mr. Wilson—the segregation of negro clerks, both men and women. It appeared that the Secretary of the Treasury had planned to put Patterson at the head of an exclusively negro division upon the plea—to use Mr. McAdoo's own words—"that it would give the negroes an opportunity of national dimensions, to prove their fitness to run, unaided by whites, an important bureau of the Department." Just why this beneficent undertaking was dropped as soon as it appeared that an Indian and not a negro was to head the division has not appeared; if it had all the merit claimed for it, the negroes should not have been deprived of the opportunity of collectively demonstrating their worth, which, in the individual, has long been known to all familiar with the Government's operations.

Careful inquiry by a representative of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, and by newspaper men of the standing of Washington correspondents of the *New York Evening Post* and Boston *Advertiser*, has developed the fact that segregation of colored

employees exists and is increasing, especially in the Bureau of Engraving and Printing, in the Post-Office Department, and in the office of the Auditor for the Post-Office, which is a part of the Treasury Department, and that it has begun in the Washington city post-office. As yet, segregation has not been introduced in the Treasury Building, where there are two hundred and seventy colored employees in the corridors and offices together with white clerks. It is defended by Mr. McAdoo as "an effort to remove causes of complaint and friction where white women have been forced unnecessarily to sit at desks with colored men." But there is no statement that there have been many such complaints or that they were heard of under previous Administrations. Nor is it explained why colored clerks are taken out of rooms in which their sole companions are white men, or why, if there should be segregation because of the women, the Government does not segregate all its women clerks. Nor does Mr. McAdoo record the fact that in many instances the white clerks, without respect to sex, have gone to their colored associates and expressed their complete dissent from the Government's caste undertaking. He indignantly denies that poorer quarters have been given to the segregated, but eye-witnesses have told of colored women shut off in an unpleasant alcove in one office; of others quietly forced out of the lunch-room they had been using for nine years past and compelled to go into lavatories at the lunch-hour, of men clerks segregated behind lockers in one corner of a room in the dead-letter division of the Post-Office Department. Poorer accommodations for the segregated are the invariable law of segregation. The assignment of separate toilet-rooms to the races under threats of prompt punishment for failure to obey the rules has been another of the deeply humiliating features of the Washington segregation. To the colored workers all this segregating has been more brutal than a slap in the face. It is as if the great Government of the United States had gone out of its way to stamp them publicly as lepers, as physically and morally contagious and unfit for association with white people. Among them are perhaps veterans of Fort Wagner, of the Crater of Petersburg, and survivors of the triumphal march into Richmond of General Godfrey Weitzel's black brigade; certainly brothers and sisters of the black troopers who were good enough to die alongside of white men in saving

the day at San Juan Hill are now learning to know the *gratitude* of Republics.

These colored people who are thus branded are not roustabouts, or corner loafers, or worthless laborers. They are educated men and women, college graduates many of them, from all over the country who have passed their civil-service examinations and entered the Government's employ with full faith in its justice, asking merely the right to serve on equal terms with their fellows. The readers of *THE NORTH AMERICAN REVIEW* will understand the bitter humiliation of the segregation orders if they can imagine themselves set apart as unworthy by brute authority, but they can hardly appreciate the added sense of injury which comes from the fact that this is an act of the Federal Government. The negroes have borne as patiently as the children of Israel bore their burdens, the wrongs of disfranchisement, the lynchings and burnings of innocent and guilty, the humiliation of the "Jim Crow" car, the constant personal insults of low whites; these were the acts of individuals or of States lately in rebellion. But that the Federal Government, under whose flag they have fought in every war, under whose ægis they are working, which struck their fetters from their limbs, should now take the side of the oppressors in the year of the fiftieth anniversary of Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation—this is what hurts and rankles beyond all else. Is it any wonder that one of the leaders of the race of national renown writes that he has never seen his people so discouraged and so embittered as to-day?

They rightly declare—as must every fair-minded man free from prejudice—that this spells caste. They believe that it is intended to drive them out of the public service by rendering it intolerable for negroes with self-respect; they assert that one of the Assistant Secretaries of the Treasury has already held up the promotion of two colored clerks because of their color. Segregation is, beyond doubt, an entering wedge, and here is the chief significance of it all. Let a precedent be established, and who shall say what the outcome will be, to what lengths despotic officials will take their way by means of discrimination, intimidation, by aboveboard or underhand methods? Who shall prophesy to what extent this caste idea may not be developed in the decades to come? If negroes can thus be set apart contrary

to the spirit of the civil-service law and of the Constitution itself, why not others—Jews, for instance? This phase of it ought to appeal to every supporter of the Woodrow Wilson Administration. Every Administration that comes into power in Washington, whether it be good or bad, must expect to encounter an enormous amount of criticism. The more virile the Government, the more determined it is to put through reforms on behalf of the whole people and to strike at intrenched privilege, the more certain it is to be criticized and to have its motives questioned and assailed. This has been particularly true of the Wilson Administration.

How short-sighted as well as unjust it was, then, for it to have raised this issue of segregation at this time, or, for that matter, at any time! Did it not have troubles enough with Mexico, with the Philippines, with the currency problem—with a hundred-odd things? At the outset of his career as President, Mr. Wilson has, from a politician's point of view, most wrongly and needlessly antagonized one-ninth of the population of this country and its white sympathizers. He has alienated thousands of colored voters in pivotal States, when it would have been so easy to let the situation rest precisely as it was under Mr. Taft. Indeed, it may come to pass that Mr. Wilson will go down to history as the man who set in motion terrible forces for evil without adequate conception or prevision of the dangers he was inviting.

Mr. Wilson has proved himself in many respects a noble and inspired leader with rare political intuition. No one, moreover, can deny that he finds himself in this matter in a terribly difficult position. He is between the devil and the deep sea; on one side the negro-haters so powerful in and out of Congress and official life; on the other side sympathy for the oppressed and disadvantaged, fair play, true democracy, justice, liberty, and an old freedom beckon to him. And his philosophy, if he remains silent and segregates further, will be wrong, his democracy gravely at fault; he has given us beautiful and worthy sentiments in his book called *The New Freedom*, and in his various speeches prior to and since his election to the Presidency. But nowhere thus far do we find any indication that his democracy is not limited both by the sex line and the color line. He fails utterly to see that to discriminate in his democracy against any one is to bring his whole carefully reared edifice crash-

ing to the ground. The principles upon which our democracy rests must apply to everybody without discrimination, as exactly as a law of science, or they are open to doubt at once. Thus, we should not believe in the law of gravitation if it did not apply alike to every human being; we should not think very much of Mr. Marconi's wireless invention if he could transmit only the first half of the alphabet and not the last. It avails the apologists for the President not at all to say that *The New Freedom* applies only to political and economic problems, for what is the whole race problem but an economic and political one? It would certainly be ridiculous for Mr. Wilson, or his publishers, to expect any appreciative reading among the millions of disfranchised Americans, whether they be colored men and women or white men and women, of his theory of the coming of a new political freedom at the very moment when there is placed upon the colored by two of his own Cabinet an official stigma which no amount of appointing to office will remove.

Mr. McAdoo boasts that he has appointed some colored men to office, and retained other deserving ones, but his policy, whether he knows it or not, is to add to the burdens of the disadvantaged, to make life harder for those whom God made in His image, but with a darker skin; to limit opportunity for those who are rising with all odds against them. One of Mr. McAdoo's colleagues in the Cabinet, to the writer's knowledge, has gone so far as to say that the South is in the saddle and negroes should hold only laborers' positions under the Government. Is it any wonder that one of Mr. McAdoo's subordinates, the collector of internal revenue at Atlanta, was quoted in the public press as saying that "there are no Government positions for negroes in the South; a negro's place is in the corn-field," and as having the intention of throwing every colored employee out of office on charges of incompetency drawn and tried by him? This interview has been disavowed by this collector, but what we have not yet had is proof that he has not this policy at heart and will not carry it out as best and as soon as he can. What Mr. McAdoo does not appreciate is that the slightest yielding to prejudice on the part of a high Federal official will find a dozen imitators in the lower official ranks who think by outdoing their masters to curry favor with those in power.

Mr. McAdoo, in defense of Mr. Wilson, than whom he

says "no truer, nobler, and braver soldier in the cause of humanity has appeared since the death of Lincoln," declares that those who would criticize this segregation policy do so unjustly and do "infinite harm to the negro race." What he does not see is that if only one colored man or woman has been segregated it gives the deliberate lie to Mr. Wilson's promise to advance the interests of the race and violates his pledge of absolute fair dealing. The men who are injuring the President are not the defenders of this Government's reputation for honor and of the rights of the colored people, but those subordinates who by their official actions have made dubious the President's word. Wittingly or unwittingly the Wilson Administration has allied itself with the forces of reaction, and put itself on the side of every torturer, of every oppressor, of every perpetrator of racial injustice in the South or the North.

The amazing thing about it is the political stupidity of the policy. It is a blunder one does not expect in men of Mr. McAdoo's mentality; it is as if he and his chief had deliberately set themselves to drive supporters away from them. He has put into the hands of the Republican party an issue which, if they have the sense to use it, may be just the touchstone they are seeking, and give them just the battle-cry they need to bring together their scattered, beaten, and demoralized forces. But the folly of raising this race issue does not stop there. It differs but very little from the one that rent the Union. The great struggle which convulsed the United States was, in its simplest terms, nothing else than an attempt of an aristocracy of cotton and land to create two classes of human beings in this country, the slaves and the free. They were willing to sacrifice the Union and everything else to this end. Those who in this day and generation are seeking to establish two classes of citizens, the disfranchised and enfranchised, to say that there shall be two kinds of Government employees—as does Mr. McAdoo's Cabinet associate—they are on the high road to convulsing anew this land of liberty, which will never know peace and quiet as long as there are discriminations among its citizens. Upon their heads will be the responsibility of forcing the issue. To oppress any group of human beings, or to deny them full equality, is to court disaster. For each repression there is certain to come a terrible reckoning.

OSWALD GARRISON VILLARD.